

Exchange With Reporters on Iraq July 21, 1992

Q. Mr. President, have you heard anything about Saddam Hussein being assassinated?

The President. I only saw a wire service report. And they have no confirmation of that at all.

Q. Is the U.S. ready to turn up the heat on Iraq again, Mr. President?

The President. We want Iraq to comply

with the United Nations resolution. And we are insisting that they comply with the U.N. resolution. But I know nothing about the other at all.

Note: The exchange began at 10:20 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House prior to the President's departure for Philadelphia, PA.

Remarks at the Presidential Open Forum on Educational Choice in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania July 21, 1992

The President. Before taking your questions let me just make a few brief comments. The first, of course, is to say how very, very pleased I am to be here, and secondly, to thank Maria for that extraordinarily personal and generous and kind welcome and introduction; to say to Kelly Geiger, I'm glad he's not running for President this year—[laughter]—articulate guy that he is. But I was most moved, as I told His Eminence, by Kelly's presentation and by Maria's introduction.

I want to say how pleased I was to be here for the lovely grace, most appropriately said before our meeting here today. May I salute His Eminence Cardinal Bevilacqua and salute him for his leadership in working for the broad principle that kids ought to be able to choose the school that they attend. It is a sound principle, and I support it strongly.

Our "GI bill" for children is not conceived out of denigration for the public school system. Indeed, the way our proposal works, it would enhance and strengthen the public schools, as well as providing choice for the families that want to send their kids to parochial schools, to private schools, be they religious or not.

So we've got a good proposal. I support it all the way, and I will fight for it. I believe that it will make all schools better, not just

those that are selected by the people who participate in this marvelous program.

I also want to salute Lamar Alexander, the former Governor of the State of Tennessee, an outstanding Secretary of Education who is not afraid to take on the educational establishment because he knows and I know that in the program we have, a program called America 2000, we are on the right track in terms of offering the best possible education to every kid in this country. We literally want to revolutionize education and bring the control and participation as close as possible to the families, as close as possible to the local communities. That's the rationale behind what I think is the best and boldest new education program that's been ever conceived for our country. Again, I want to take that case to the American people.

We've made some progress in education, but we've got to do more. We have six national education goals that we've set out, and it ranges all the way from Head Start, support for that, all the way up to the fact that no one's too old to learn. Lamar talked me into demonstrating that no one is too old to learn, and I've learned now how to turn on my computer, and I am making dramatic headway. [Laughter] I refuse to take on any of these kids, however, in computer science. But we've got a good pro-

gram, and it fits nicely into the values that I believe the church here epitomizes.

One last conclusion, and then I'll take your questions. I met today with some mayors from various communities across the country, the Mayor of New Orleans, a large city, the Mayor of a tiny town of Herne, Texas, down in my part of the world. They got onto this subject of family values, something that Kelly talked about I thought in a most articulate way, something that obviously His Eminence stands for, and it's something we've been talking about at our table over here. I remembered not just this meeting but a meeting I had with the other mayors from the National League of Cities. They told me, as this group did today, that the major worry that they have in terms of cities, the major thing that contributes to crime in the cities or lack of discipline or disorder, is the decline of the American family. We have got to find ways to strengthen it.

In this audience, obviously, I'm preaching to the choir. I'm talking to people that live these values, in churches that stand for the values. But it is very, very important that we find ways to improve, to help families restore those great family values of discipline and respect and order, and respect for one's parents, and right from wrong, and the values that, I'll be honest, a lot of us, my generation, just took for granted simply. But now we've got to find ways as citizens, as people involved in politics, whether you're President of the United States or someone in the local spectrum here, to do what we can to strengthen the family values.

When Kelly spoke from his heart as he did, it made a tremendous impression on me. There's an awful lot of good out here in this country, an awful lot to be proud of, an awful lot to respect. We're in a funny time now where it's fashionable to tear down our country or to offer some theory that we've been wrong in the past. But when it comes to values, when it comes to education, I think that we must turn to where our strength is, and that is helping improve the family, but it is also in our faith. I won't ever forget as long as I'm President, Lincoln talked about going to his knees in prayer. I'll also not forget that we are one Nation under God, and that's some-

thing we must never forget.

We have these wandering microphone holders here. I don't know how they were selected for this awesome responsibility. But nevertheless, somebody stick their hand up, and we'll just take a few questions before I have to go on to New Jersey.

All right, don't be shy. Kelly, come on, you ask—let me just—we're encouraging this. Here we are, right here, sir.

[A participant expressed concern about the affordability of parochial school for his grandchildren and supported the President's proposal.]

The President. Well, we're going to continue to support it, Officer. I'll tell you, I am not pessimistic about the economic future. One of the things we must do—and set aside for a minute this question of educational choice—one of the things we must do is succeed in our overall approach to quality education. The way we are going to guarantee the future for your kids and those that follow is going to be to have an economic environment, an economic environment in this country where people can get jobs.

We've been through this long, slow recession. We're growing a little bit now as a country. In my view, we are poised for a good recovery. Our interest rates are down; inflation is down, and all of this. But to succeed, to really compete in the world, we are going to have to succeed in achieving by the end of this decade our six educational goals. I think we can do it. If we do, we're going to be able to compete. We'll have better jobs, and we're going to be able to sell more abroad. Exports have saved us, incidentally, in this slow, anemic time, a time of anemic economic growth.

So as I look at how to answer the questions to your kids coming along, one of them has got to be success in achieving these six national educational goals. Then, of course, a part of that is school choice; a part of that is encouraging, every way we can, excellence in education.

We've got good programs to increase the math and science. I was only half kidding when I mentioned the computer. We are

not going to succeed and compete abroad if we don't do better in math and science. Lamar has pushed through some very strong support for those who are studying and teaching in math and science. So we can make it, but we've got to go along and succeed in our goals here.

Yes, sir.

[A participant asked about the funding for the President's proposal.]

The President. The money is coming from a regular appropriation, if we can get it passed. It will start as a \$500 million demonstration program, and it's figured into our budget so it will not increase the deficit. It will come through the regular appropriations process in the Congress if we can get the United States Congress to think new thoughts. The problem is many that control the educational establishment in Washington are in the grips of a very powerful union, the NEA. If you'll excuse me one political comment, it seems to be an arm of the opposition party. They are not thinking anew. They are fighting us on school choice, and many of the Congressmen just don't want to stand up against that.

But it doesn't matter what party you're in, we've got to get the programs through. Then, if it gets passed, it is already covered under our budget, so it won't add to the deficit. That's the way it will come, regular appropriations.

[A participant asked about educational assistance for middle-income families.]

The President. You're right. And this program that we're talking about here today, there is no means testing. A family like yours would be covered, a family like yours who, you know, hard-working people and want to have this question of choice. That \$1,000 would go to the family. As His Eminence said, it isn't a question of church and state being involved here; we're talking about to the family.

Let me give you an example of how this would work, and this goes back into history. When I got out of the Navy a thousand years ago, I participated in what was called the GI bill. They didn't say to me, you can have this money to go to a certain kind of school, a public university or a parochial

or private university. You can go wherever you want. That has benefited the public universities. Most people that look back and analyze participation in the GI bill will tell you that the competition that came from this benefited the public university.

That same principle of choice and no means testing will apply to this program that we're talking about now. So you would get some relief. That doesn't answer how you cope with the other costs, but in terms of this educational "GI bill" for children, the middle class that you're talking about would be covered.

Yes, way back there, Father.

[A participant expressed concern that lower income and minority students could not afford Catholic schools and asked if the President's proposal could really be passed.]

The President. I'm not sure I can answer in the affirmative. I can tell you we are totally committed. I can't guarantee you that this Congress, sitting there as it is, will pass it. We all need to get behind it. But I can guarantee you I am going to clearly take this case to the American people this fall, get it in focus, and have that a part of the ingredient upon which people vote.

I am determined not to bring into this lovely school arena, gymnasium, or whatever wonderful auditorium we're in a lot of partisan politics. But here is an issue upon which I have a distinct difference with my opponent. I will be making that case, not in a negative way but saying, here's what I am for; here's what I am going to fight for. If you believe in this, you ought to vote not only for me but for Members of the United States Congress whose support is going to be necessary to pass this legislation.

But the reason I have to hedge a little on the question is, I'll be honest with you, we're moving into a very political environment in Washington, and I don't know whether this Congress is going to take up and support this legislation now or not. I'm going to challenge them to do that, but we'll see if they do it. But that's the one good thing about an ugly election year; you get it in focus. Right now it's not. I don't think every American is thinking, am I for the "GI bill" or not? I've got to do a better

job making them know that this is an issue.

But the good thing is that will be clearly a distinction between candidates for Presidency, for Congress. And the American people will decide. Then you move early; you move quick with that mandate ringing in the ears of the Congress to get it passed. I think it will be held over. I hope we can get it done soon.

[A participant asked about funding for education of handicapped children.]

The President. Presidents are never supposed to say “I don’t know.” That’s a very bad form. And Presidents are supposed to know absolutely everything and not be quite as omnipotent as the Cardinal but nevertheless—[laughter]—know a lot. I would ask Lamar to address the question of what kind of funding we’re doing. But I will say this, one of the great, the most forward-looking pieces of civil rights legislation that has been passed in history was the Americans for Disabilities Act. I take great pride in being the steward of that legislation. In fairness, I’ve got to say it wasn’t Republican; it wasn’t just Democrat. It was a case where we could get together with the Congress and do something that was right for people, so that people that were born with disabilities would not be shoved off to the side but find a way to get instrumentally involved in the system itself to the best of their abilities.

Lamar, do you know the answer on funding, what we’re doing on special ed? Maybe you could grab the mike. And if you don’t, pass it over to the Cardinal. [Laughter]

Secretary Alexander. Two quick points, Mr. President; I’ll be glad to sit down with the lady afterwards and talk a little more. One is the funding for special education has been increased, but not as much as it takes to fully fund the law that you’ve mentioned. The President’s top budget priority: more new money into Education this year than any other Department in the Federal budget.

Second, there have been big increases in Head Start over the last 4 years, 127 percent while the Federal budget only went up 25 percent. That helps with the early intervention for young children.

The President. In fact, we have fully fund-

ed, I think it’s every 4-year-old, isn’t it, eligible 4-year-old.

Back again? Shoot, Doctor.

[The participant also suggested better dissemination of information to local groups to enable them to work for congressional support of the national education goals.]

The President. It’s a very broad and difficult question to answer. Clearly, citizen participation is going to make a difference. It doesn’t hurt to start with your own Congressman, regardless of party. It doesn’t hurt to start with your own Senators. But I think that we do need to do a better job, and I would accept full responsibility for this, in getting the American people informed.

Because, you’re right, a lot of this has been languishing in the Congress. I have a great big battle with the Congress on many, many issues. I’m not saying I’m always right, but the result has been, as we try to move these kind of things through, and the American people are saying there’s gridlock, nothing can happen. The way to change that is to look at the electoral process. Do not get turned off for politics. If you believe in this “GI bill” or if you believe in strengthening the family or whatever it is, then vote for people that agree with you. Then you can dramatically change things.

So that is the fundamental way to get it done. But how we can disseminate information better, that’s something that I’ve got to find out because I don’t think a lot of people know of the conviction I feel on education, on excellence, on choice, and on these very, some would say, revolutionary concepts but concepts that ought to be tried.

So don’t give up on the political process is what I’d say.

[A participant urged others to vote for candidates who support educational choice.]

The President. Thank you, sir, very much. I’ll make a broad comment on that; certainly grateful for what this gentleman said. There’s disenchantment. But the worst thing to do is to give up: “So, I’m not going to vote. I’m going to sit on the sidelines. Nobody can get anything done.” You look

around the world today, and the United States is still the envy of the entire world. For us to give up on our system because of a frustration, we ought not to do that. We have got to do exactly what you've said.

I am not going to give up on fighting for this. The election offers us a great opportunity. I'm not just talking about me; as you said, I'm talking about Congress where we must change things. I won't give you my political speech about one party controlling the United States Congress since 1956. They don't know how to run a post office, and they don't know how to run a bank. We need to change that while we're at it.

[A participant said that without financial assistance, her younger siblings would be unable to attend Catholic high school.]

The President. Was there a question, or are you just explaining? If there was a question, I am embarrassed to say I couldn't hear it. But I did get your statement. Thank you.

[A participant speculated that the collapse of the private school system would place a burden on public education.]

The President. You know how to complicate my life; don't do that. You ask a good question. You know, I love the pride that obviously you feel in the education you're getting. I love the family feeling around here about the importance of providing this kind of education with family and faith and all of that as a centerpiece. I mean, that's good.

As President I've got to look at that, and then I've got to look beyond it: What can we do to strengthen all the education in this country? They aren't going to crater; these schools are not going to crater. The private schools are not going to crater and fall down. You've got too much going for you in terms of excellence. And yes, it's a strain on the Catholic Church. I was told by a leading businessman in Philadelphia coming out here that business people in Philadelphia put up something like \$75 million, I believe was the fee—not Catholic; others put it up there—to support the parochial schools, the private schools and parochial schools, because they believed in offering the best possible quality education.

So don't worry that the whole system is going to collapse.

But as President, and I'm sure everyone here would agree with this, it isn't a question of just making these schools better and then denying the great public school system in this country. We want to make that better. We want to bring change to those marvelous institutions that can do a better job. We think this whole concept of choice will improve everybody else as well as helping the families.

So I don't look at it in a catastrophic sense. I look at it in the sense of real opportunity to help families here, to help kids here achieve what they want to achieve, but not at the expense of the public schools. That's the point we've got to make.

The NEA, that national union, is fighting me on this. They are fighting hard, but they are not willing to look at the big picture. They're not willing to look at the establishment. Art, sitting at our table, was telling me about that. He's a teacher in the public schools, and this NEA crowd is fighting any kind of change because they just like it the way it's been. I don't like it the way it's been. I want to help those public schools get better. I want to see families have their choice to send their kids to the schools they want. And that's the message. That's the underlying message. So when you hear the big assault on us in the fall about this question, please do not be taken in by that rhetoric. This is going to enhance education all across the board, in my view.

All right. Are we out of here? Okay, I'm going to violate a rule. I've been in politics a long time, half my life in politics, half in private life. This lesson I learned in politics: If you take one more question, you always get in trouble. But go ahead, what is it? Question, not a speech, please, sir. *[Laughter]*

[A participant stated his support for the President's reelection as the best way to address the Nation's problems.]

The President. That is the exception that proves the rule I was talking about. *[Laughter]*

Let me say, first of all, thank you. I think I know where you're coming from. Even

Presidents get moved by anecdotes and talk of family like that.

We do have to win this war against drugs and crime. This gentleman's a police officer. We have anticrime legislation—again, I don't want to be placing blame, but it is languishing in the House of Representatives—that would support the police officers that are laying their lives on the line for you and me every single day: more support for them, tougher sentencing, a little more respect for the victims of crime, and a little less concern about the criminal himself.

We have got legislation up there that really needs to go now to the American people. I'll be doing this in the fall after we get out of this funny period we're in now, and say: Do you want to be tougher on this crime? Do you want to have, yes, rehabilitation and all of that? Do you want to strengthen the families that are threatened when some mother's coming home at night on a subway or a bus and the kids waiting there, doesn't even know if she's going to make it back there? The answer is we do have to be hardnosed and tough against the criminal element and then support those and try to rehabilitate some of these kids that are caught up in this drug fight.

We've got a good program called "Weed and Seed" that I went over with the police chief here before he moved out to California. It weeds out of the neighborhoods the criminal elements and then seeds them with jobs and hope and opportunity and homeownership and a lot of other things.

So, no Federal program is going to solve it. What's going to solve it is what you feel surrounded by family, love, and faith in this room. I really mean this. Don't take my word for it; talk to these mayors. How do

we restructure and strengthen the American family?

But I will do my level-best to take to the American people the case that your comments brought to my mind: Strengthen the family and the neighborhoods by protection; do it by education; do it by changing the welfare system to have respect for learning and work and not just dependency. Then do it in a Christian way, as I would say here in a Christian setting, but do it in a way of faith because you've got to recognize that a lot of people have had it very, very rough.

I will end with this, and I hope you understand. Barbara Bush says what happens in your house is what's more important than in the White House. In a way she's right because what she's talking about there is the need to hold these families together, lift these kids up and give them the love. Every kid has to have somebody that knows his name. Sometimes, in this hopelessness and despair, that doesn't take place.

So, I really want to help you try to get to the bottom of what you've talking about here. It is an odd year. It has not been particularly pleasant for me or my family, but I'm a fighter, and I'm going to take this case to the American people.

May God bless all of you. Thank you very, very much.

Note: The President spoke at 12:36 p.m. at Archbishop Ryan High School. In his remarks, he referred to students Maria Manzoni, a junior at St. Maria Goretti High School, and Kelly Geiger, a senior at Roman Catholic High School; and Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua, Archbishop of Philadelphia.

Remarks to Religious and Ethnic Groups in Garfield, New Jersey July 21, 1992

May I thank you, Governor Kean, for that warm welcome back. May I salute our assemblyman, Chuck Haytaian, our senate president, Don DiFrancesco, and our House candidate, Pat Roma. I'm delighted to see you

all. May I ask that we pay our respects to His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius, the Archbishop of Washington, the Primate of the Church; and Archbishop Peter, Bishop Paul, Father Alex, and members of